



## A Study of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy

### 1st Timothy 3:8-13 In the Same Way, Deacons...

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter three, verses eight through thirteen. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 992...1st Timothy 3:8-13.

This is what God's Word says:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 3:8**...Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup> Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup> For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your

Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

The section on elders that we discussed last week, 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:1-7, is framed by the little Greek δεῖ which expresses the idea of absolute necessity...usually divine necessity. When I say framed, I mean that the section more or less starts with the word δεῖ and ends with the word δεῖ. You might want to think of the word as something like a pair of bookends. The word δεῖ more or less supports or holds up the body of the paragraph. That is, the word δεῖ occurs at the beginning of the passage and at the end of the passage. The way the paragraph is written is a little like a small room with two doors...one door is the entrance to the room and the other door is the exit on the other side of the room and both doors have the word δεῖ written on them. That means when you enter the paragraph (I'm still using the room analogy) you enter through the door of divine necessity and when you leave the room you leave through the door of divine necessity. I am emphasizing the point because that is what the word δεῖ means...well, that is usually what it means...and it is certainly Paul's point here in 1st Timothy 3.

Last week I cited two familiar New Testament passages that both used this little word δεῖ to try to show you just how the word is used.

If you will remember, I cited Luke 19:5 and the story about Zacchaeus. The word δεῖ is translated by the English word "must." Alright listen to the passage and you'll see what I mean.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 19:5**...And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up (he had to look up because Zaccheus had climbed up a tree in order to see him because Zaccheus was

so short) and said to him, "**Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.**"

Now here's my point. It wasn't simply that Jesus wanted to eat with Zacchaeus or even that it would be some sort of benefit to them both. Rather it was that he had to.

Why?

Because, I think, God demanded it. He ordained to be.

I then quoted Acts chapter 9, right after the Lord Jesus confronts Paul on the road to Damascus. The Lord Jesus he tells Ananias to go meet Paul. Ananias responds to the Lord that he is deeply concerned about meeting Paul because of Paul's terrible reputation for persecuting the church. So the Lord responds to Ananias in verse 15.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 9:15...But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."**

The word δεῖ is used near the very end of the verse and is translated "**must**" as in "**must suffer.**" What the Lord Jesus is saying of course is that Paul is his chosen instrument to go before Gentiles and kings and even before the children of Israel and that he intends to show Paul just how much it is necessary for him to suffer in order to fulfill his ministry. Why? It was because he had ordained it to be so for the advance of the gospel.

Could the Lord Jesus have chosen someone else to do what he wanted Paul to do?  
Of course.

Could Paul have refused? Absolutely not! It was a divine necessity.

Now my point last week was that the traits described in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:1-7 must be possessed by overseers in the church in order for them to properly fulfill their oversight of the church. Those character traits are not merely a suggestion or a hopeful wish list. Rather, they are an absolute necessity, a divine necessity, for an overseer to fulfill his task.

Now in the context of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy what that means is that Paul's solution for dealing with the false teachers at Ephesus is not to lay out a complex theological rebuttal to the false teachers. As a matter of fact, we never are really quite sure just what their heresy actually was. Oh we know it had something to do with how they mishandled the Old Testament and the law but that's all we know. We never do learn the exact nature of their error. Now I am pretty sure the Ephesians knew what their error was, but we don't know. And the reason we don't know is because the Spirit of God has not chosen to tell us which makes me think that it is not particularly important to the point Paul is trying to make here in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy. Rather the point that he is trying to make is that the solution to the problem of heresy at Ephesus is to choose men of character to stand up to the false teachers.

Now I am the first to admit that the good character Paul desires in the office of overseer or elder will come as a result of the gospel having done its work in their hearts. I get that by going all the way back to Paul's own gratitude for his

conversion and his very emotional response to God's mercy back in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:12.

**ESV 1 Timothy 1:12...**I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,<sup>13</sup> though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,<sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.<sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.<sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

You see the kind of character that Paul wants to see in overseers is the kind of character that is formed in a heart that has been overcome by the gospel. It is a heart that used to be like a wild stallion but has been tamed and made gentle by the loving consistent hand of a master that sees an even greater use of that's stallion's strength and power. It is a heart that no longer seeks the freedom to run wild in an aimless sort of way. Rather, it's a heart that seeks only to please its master...and its master alone. It is a heart that has been tamed and reduced to a single purpose...doing its master's will.

It is a heart that has developed a sort of innate, unflinching, ethical stubbornness that looks at the opportunity to sin or the opportunity to advance itself and says, **"I simply cannot do that. I cannot go against the kindness of my Savior who redeemed me from my sin because I am bound up in him. It is not a question of my own personal desire or even my own sinful inclinations...I do still have those things but man, don't you see I am in union with Christ. I am bound up with a golden chain. I have bit in my mouth...no, I have bridle on my heart that will not allow me to go my own way...and here's the thing...I wouldn't have**

**any other way. When I do slip that bridle...when I do go my own way...I feel a sort of lostness until I come back under my master's reign. I am not my own...rather, I am bought with a price. I have a heart that is stirred on by the gratitude that the gospel demands."**

Paul says that's the kind of man that needs to be chosen to be an overseer. He must...absolutely must be a man of character. And I think the implication is that such a man possesses a sort of moral pigheadedness that finds it comfort not in the praise of men but in the pursuit and service of God.

Take for example this wonderful little description of dialogue between the famous fifth century preacher John Chrysostom and an unbelieving Roman king.

When Chrysostom was brought before the Roman Emperor, the Emperor threatened him with banishment if he remained a Christian. Chrysostom replied, **"Nay, you cannot banish me for this world is my father's house."**

**"Then I will slay you,"** said the Emperor. **"Nay, you cannot,"** said the noble champion of the faith, **"for my life is hid with Christ in God."**

**"Then I will take away thy treasures."**

**"Nay, you cannot for my treasure and my heart is in heaven."**

**"Then I will drive thee out from among men and you will have no friend left."**

**"Nay, you cannot, for I have a friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me."**

Chrysostom then turned and looked straight at the emperor and said, **"Therefore, I defy you; for there is nothing you can do to hurt me."**<sup>1</sup>

You see what I mean. The man had a sort of ethical pigheadedness about him. That is the kind of character Paul thinks elders and overseers need. If they have that kind of character, they will make short work of the false teachers.

Now the remarkable thing about 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3 is that it uses that same little word  $\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}$  a third time. It uses it twice to frame the qualifications of an overseer. It does that in verse two and in verse seven and then he uses it again down in verse fifteen which I'll talk about next week. What is surprising, I think, is that he does not use it at all in verses eight through thirteen...the section on the qualification of deacons.

Now the fact that he does not use it all leads me to want to ask, **“Does that mean that the qualifications for deacons are somehow less important than that of overseers or elders? Does that mean, for instance, that the qualifications for elders and overseers are nonnegotiable while the recommendations for deacons are more of a suggestion than an absolute necessity?”**

The answer to that question is, **“No! The qualifications for being a deacon are every bit as important as the qualifications for being an overseer.”** And that is true, even though the section on the qualifications for deacons does not use that little word  $\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}$ . You see instead of using the little word  $\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}$  that indicates divine necessity it uses the section on the qualifications for being a deacon uses the word  $\acute{\omega}\sigma\alpha\acute{\upsilon}\tau\omega\varsigma$  which means **“likewise”** or **“in the same way”** or **“in the same manner.”**<sup>2</sup>

My point is that the qualifications for being a deacon are no less important, no less rigorous, than those for being an overseer. In fact, what we are going to see as we look through these six verses is that many of the qualifications for being a deacon are exactly the same as those for being an elder. There is one clear distinction in

the qualifications for being and overseer and the qualifications for being a deacon...a man's aptness to teach...but by and large the qualifications are almost the same.

Now if you still have the handout I gave out last week you will notice that the chart on the back of the handout shows which character qualities are the same for the two offices. The chart is taken from a commentary by William Mounce.<sup>3</sup>

<i>Overseer</i> 1 Tim. 3:1-7	<i>Deacons</i> 1 Tim. 3:8-13	<i>Elder</i> Titus 1:5-9	<i>Opponents</i>
"good work"			"worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:16)
"above reproach"; "good reputation"	"above reproach"	"above reproach"	bring reproach on the church (Titus 1:11-14)
"one-woman man"	"one-woman man"	"one-woman man"	seduce women (2 Tim. 3:6)
"self-controlled"		"self-controlled"	uncontrolled (2 Tim. 3:6)
"hospitable"		"hospitable"	upset house churches (2 Tim. 3:6)
"skilled teacher"		"able to exhort with sound teaching and rebuke"	teaching a different gospel (1 Tim. 1:3; cf. 4:7; 5:3; 6:4, 20; 2 Tim. 4:3-4)
"do not fall into the devil's snare"			taken captive by the devil (1 Tim. 1:20; 4:1; 5:15; 2 Tim. 2:26)
"gracious"		"not arrogant"	teaching results in "quarrels" (2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9)
"not a lover of money"	"not greedy"	"not greedy for gain"	think godliness is a "means of profit" (1 Tim. 6:5); "lovers of money" (2 Tim. 3:2); "shameful gain" (Titus 1:11)
"managing his own household well, having submissive children"	"managing their children and their own household well"	"having faithful children, not . . . rebellious"	"disobedient to parents" (2 Tim. 3:2); "rebellious" (Titus 1:10)

Now I do think the chart can be improved upon. For example, in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:8 says that:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 3:8**...Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine...

I think perhaps not being addicted to much wine means the same thing as being self-controlled which that particular block perhaps should be filled in under the deacon's column. Still, overall the chart gives a good representation of where and how the qualifications match or lineup.

The chart makes it especially clear, I think, that the office of overseer in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3 and the office of elder in Titus 1 are the same exact office.

Now with all that as an introduction, let's take a moment to work our way through the qualifications for a deacon found in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:8-13. Let's start with verse eight.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 3:8**...Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

Now I've already mentioned the word "likewise" making the requirements for the office of deacon just as important or necessary as the requirements for overseers. But notice that the word specifically states that deacons must be "**dignified.**" I think in the context that means pretty much the same thing "**above reproach**" meant for elders.<sup>4</sup> They are to be men without observable flaws...not perfect...not sinless...but dignified in their lives.

But in case there is any doubt what he means, Paul turns to three particular character traits to spell out what being dignified looks like. It means the deacon

must be under control in terms of how he speaks, in terms of how much he drinks, and in terms of how much he wants.

Now in terms of how a deacon speaks Paul says he is not to be double-tongued which means, I think, that he is not to speak out of both sides of his mouth. He is not to talk one way one time and another way another time. That means he is to speak with a measure of consistency. He is not to be an insincere man. When he says something...he means it. When he promises something, he would rather die than fail to deliver. He is not a two-tongued man. He is a one-tongued man.

Now not only he is controlled in terms of what comes out of his mouth, he is also controlled in what goes into his mouth. Paul says that he is not addicted to much wine. Wine doesn't control his life. He is not enslaved by wine or anything else. I think that means inferentially that he is also not enslaved to peach cobbler or pecan pie.

Finally, being dignified means he is not controlled by a lust for money. This is particularly important for deacons as they are given to be stewards over the church's financial resources. A greedy man...a man consumed by a lust for money...is apt to find all sorts of creative ways to rob from God's people. In the last couple of years in our own presbytery we've seen a couple men fall prey to allurements of riches and actually embezzle money from their churches. But a deacon must be beyond such things. He must be a man of character.

And what is the source of that character. What is the thing that gives a man the strength to gain some sort of mastery over his baser instincts...over his sinful inclinations. Paul answers that question, I think, in verse nine.

**ESV 1 Timothy 3:9**...They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

Deacons are not to be theological neophytes. They must comprehend the depths of the gospel. They are to comprehend it and hang on to it. They are to be men shaped by the gospel...pushed along by the gospel.

Now one of the most interesting aspects of this particular point is that Paul does not list as a requirement for deacons that they be apt to teach. That does not mean that he expects deacons to be uninformed. Paul does expect deacons to have a proper understanding of the great mystery of salvation. By mystery here Paul does not mean something is mysterious. Rather he means something that used to be unknown but has now been revealed...he means the gospel.

You see Paul's point is that their character will flow upwards from their understanding of the gospel. The lives they live will be reflections of the gospel taming their hearts.

Now the interesting thing about this profound theological understanding of the gospel is that it tends to loosen a man's tongue...that is, it emboldens him to speak the truth of the gospel.

One of the strangest observations a student ever makes about the book of Acts is that right in the middle of the extraordinary work of God in the early church, the best sermon...the most impassioned defense of the gospel...is not given by an apostle or even by an overseer but rather by a deacon.

Turn for a moment to Acts 6.

Now the immediate context of the passage is that the church has decided to pick seven men who can see to the care of the Hellenized widows in the church. The apostles felt a responsibility to continue their ministry of the word and of prayer and as a result of not wanting to give up that important ministry chose seven men to tend to the widows in the church. One of the men chosen among these seven deacons was a man named Stephen.

Let's put in verse five.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 6:5**...And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup> And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. <sup>8</sup> And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

The thing I want you to notice here is that Stephen had the gift of teaching. He was a deacon and he had the gift of teaching. His gift was so powerful through Spirit of God that none of the opponents of the gospel were able to withstand him face to face.

Later on in chapter seven of Acts, Stephen is called before the Sanhedrin and there he gives an impassioned defense of the gospel...so powerful, in fact, that his

enemies gnash their teeth at him and drag him outside the city and stone him to death.

Stephen's ability to teach certainly made an impression of the early church. It is far and away the longest sermon in the Book of Acts. It is over twice as long as Peter's sermon in Acts two. But it didn't just make an impression on the church, it also made quite an impression on the enemies of the early church as well. You can see why. Stephen's sermon is not really a gospel sermon. Rather it is a law sermon in which Stephen uses the whole flow of covenant history as an indictment against the sinful unbelief of the nation. The sermon too must have made quite an impression on the Apostle Paul. I think there is good reason to argue that Paul alludes to Stephen's sermon and death at least four separate times in his epistles. It also seems pretty clear that Paul's sermon at Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13 is structured after Stephen's sermon in Acts 7.

You can see he was a pretty good teacher.

Much the same case can be made for Philip. He was another deacon ordained at the same time as Stephen. Shortly after Stephen's death and the ensuing persecution that struck the church in Jerusalem Philip winds up preaching down in Samaria and then later on to the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. He seems to have a significant handle on both how to preach and evangelize.

My point is all this is just to say, that just because Paul does not include the ability to teach as one of the requirements of being a deacon does not mean that deacons are unable to teach. They may be able to teach as well or even better than someone

holding the office of an overseer. They may have just as profound a handle on the truth of the gospel as any overseer in the church. I think that is the point of verse nine when it says they must hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience.

Of course that is not something that occurs overnight. No man goes to bed one night and wakes up spiritually mature the next. Spiritual maturity and growth takes time which seems to be the point of verse ten.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 3:10**...And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

Now the nature of the testing involved is not clear. I don't think we are talking simply about a multiple choice exam. I think rather we are talking about an exam that takes into account the difficulties of life. I think we are talking about observing a man when all the scaffolding underneath him begins to collapse. That may mean that the nature of the testing may differ from place to place. But the point is that each man taking up the office of deacon needs to be evaluated and that will require a measure of time. During that time of evaluation, the man needs to demonstrate his general faithfulness and theological maturity.

This particular step cannot be completed overnight. In that regard, it points forward I think to Paul's particular admonition to Timothy 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:22.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 5:22**...Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

You see there he is telling Timothy, **"Don't be in a rush. Being in a rush might cause you to become involved in the sins of others."** His point is that Timothy

does not want to give any such man a quick hardy approval only to find out later that that man has some sort of secret life or some sort of besetting sin that completely disqualifies him from service and if that isn't bad enough Paul seems to be making the point that doing that, giving one's approval to such a man, means to those who are looking on, that the person giving his approval somehow shares the responsibility for getting it all wrong. I think that is the point of that last little phrase at the end of verse 22 where Paul tells Timothy to, "**keep yourself pure.**"

Now verse eleven can be understood to different ways, and you should know that the ESV here has deliberately made the decision to interpret rather than simply translate.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 3:11**...Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

Now I should add that I agree with the interpretation but I would be dishonest to tell you that the Greek text is not quite as clear as the ESV tries to make it. Here's what I mean. The word "**wives**" can also be translated "**women,**" and the word "**their**" is not in the text at all. In fact, a number of commentators believe that the entire reference is not to wives at all but rather to female deacons. They argue that Paul's point is that female deacons just like male deacons should likewise be dignified. You can see how that is exactly parallel to verse eight where Paul demands that deacons be dignified. Commentators that argue for female deacons here have a point in that whoever is being referred to here has to pass much the same standard as deacons themselves.

They argue something like this, **“This must refer to female deacons and not to the deacon’s wives because there is no such similar requirement for overseer’s wives.”** In other words, if word for women or wives used there only refers to deacon’s wives it is placing upon them a burden to act a certain way that it does not place on overseer’s wives.

Still, it can be understood and I think should be understood to refer not just to the deacon’s wives but to the wives of both the overseers and deacons. That is, it is likely referring to both groups and not just one. That was Calvin’s opinion. He writes, **“He means here the wives both of deacons and of bishops, for they must be aids to their husbands in their office; which they cannot be, unless their behavior excels that of others.”**<sup>5</sup>

That view makes sense, I think, of the fact that the very next verse then turns to give the same marital instructions to deacons that it has already given to overseers which is that they must be only once married.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 3:12**...Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

Finally, Paul sums up his discussion regarding deacons by explaining the benefit deacons gain by serving well. It might be supposed from the nature of being a servant that being a deacon is a sort of ignoble job...that is, a kind of thankless, joyless drudgery.

Paul doesn’t feel that way. He sees two very significant benefits. Look at verse 13.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 3:13**...For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

First, Paul believes that fulfilling the role of a deacon elevates a man's standing in the congregation. He serves the saints in the congregation and they, as a result, give him their affection and respect. Secondly, serving as a deacon causes his own faith to grow. Why is that do you think?

I think it is because the Lord Jesus himself came as a servant and sanctified the office so that when a man serves he grows in confidence simply because he is following in the steps of the Lord Jesus himself.

Let me close by reading for you that wonderful account of our Great High Deacon from John 13:3.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 13:3**...Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, <sup>4</sup> rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." <sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." <sup>12</sup> When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. <sup>14</sup> If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1991), 171. He quotes Henry Hart Milman, *The History of Christianity* Vol. 4, 1881. Modernized slightly by me.

<sup>2</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles (NIGTC)* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 168.

<sup>3</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* in the Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 156-58.

<sup>4</sup> Knight, 168. In particular, notice Knight quoting Foerster.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy* 3:11.